Love letters of John Keats to Fanny Brawne:

To Fanny Brawne (Newport, July 3, 1819)

Newport, July 3, 1819

Shanklin, Isle of Wight, Thursday

My dearest Lady

I am glad I had not an opportunity of sending off a Letter which I wrote for you on Tuesday night—'twas too much like one out of Rousseau's Heloise. I am more reasonable this morning. The morning is the only proper time for me to write to a beautiful Girl whom I love so much: for at night, when the lonely day has closed, and the lonely, silent, unmusical Chamber is waiting to receive me as into a Sepulchre, then believe me my passion gets entirely the sway, then I would not have you see those Rhapsodies which I once thought it impossible I should ever give way to, and which I have often laughed at in another, for fear you should [think me] either too unhappy or perhaps a little mad.

I am now at a very pleasant Cottage window, looking onto a beautiful hilly country, with a glimpse of the sea; the morning is very fine. I do not know how elastic my spirit might be, what pleasure I might have in living here and breathing and wandering as free as a stag about this beautiful Coast if the remembrance of you did not weigh so upon me I have never known any unalloy'd Happiness for many days together: the death or sickness of some one has always spoilt my hours, and now when none such troubles oppress me, it is you must confess very hard that another sort of pain should haunt me.

Ask yourself my love whether you are not very cruel to have so entrammelled me, so destroyed my freedom. Will you confess this in the Letter you must write immediately, and do all you can to console me in it, make it rich as a draught of poppies to intoxicate me, write the softest words and kiss them that I may at least touch my lips where yours have been. For myself I know not how to express my devotion to so fair a form: I want a brighter word than bright, a fairer word than fair. I almost wish we were butterflies and liv'd but three summer days — three such days with you I could fill with more delight than fifty common years could ever contain. But however selfish I may feel, I am sure I could never act selfishly: as I told you a day or two before I left Hampstead, I will never return to London if my Fate does not turn up Pam or at least a Court-card. Though I could centre my Happiness in you, I cannot expect to engross your heart so entirely, indeed if I thought you felt as much for me as I do for you at this moment I do not think I could restrain myself from seeing you again tomorrow for the delight of one embrace.

But no, I must live upon hope and Chance. In case of the worst that can happen, I shall still love you, but what hatred shall I have for another!

Some lines I read the other day are continually ringing a peal in my ears:

To see those eyes I prize above mine own
Dart favors on another—
And those sweet lips (yielding immortal nectar)
Be gently press'd by any but myself—
Think, think Francesca, what a cursed thing
It were beyond expression!

John Keats.

Do write immediately. There is no Post from this Place, so you must address Post Office, Newport, Isle of Wight. I know before night I shall curse myself for having sent you so cold a Letter; yet it is better to do it as much in my senses as possible. Be as kind as the distance will permit to your

Present my Compliments to your mother, my love to Margaret and best remembrances to your Brother, if you please so.

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To Fanny Brawne (July 8th, 1819)

July 8th, 1819

My sweet girl,
Your Letter gave me more delight, than any thing in the world but yourself could do; indeed I am almost astonished that any absent one should have that luxurious power over my senses which I feel. Even when I am not thinking of you I receive your influence and a tenderer nature steeling upon me. All my thoughts, my unhappiest days and nights have I find not at all cured me of my love of Beauty, but made it so intense that I am miserable that you are not with me: or rather breathe in that dull sort of patience that cannot be called Life. I never knew before, what such a love as you have made me feel, was; I did not believe in it; my Fancy was affraid of it, lest it should burn me up. But if you will fully love me, though there may be some fire, 'twill not be more than we can bear when moistened and bedewed with Pleasures. You mention 'horrid people' and ask me whether it depend upon them whether I see you again. Do understand me, my love, in this. I have so much of you in my heart that I must turn Mentor when I see a chance of harm befalling you. I would never see any thing but Pleasure in your eyes, love on your lips, and Happiness in your steps. I would wish to see you among those amusements suitable to your inclinations and spirits; so that our loves might be a delight in the midst of Pleasures agreeable enough, rather than a resource from vexations and cares. But I doubt much, in case of the worst, whether I shall be philosopher enough to follow my own Lessons: if I saw my resolution give you a pain I could not. Why may I not speak of your Beauty, since without that I could never have lov'd you. I cannot conceive any beginning of such love as I have for you but Beauty. There may be a sort of love for which, without the least sneer at it, I have the highest respect and can admire it in others: but it has not the richness, the bloom, the full form, the enchantment of love after my own heart. So let me speak of your Beauty, though to my own endangering; if you could be so cruel to me as to try elsewhere its Power. You say you are afraid I shall think you do not love me – in saying this you make me ache the more to be near you. I am at the diligent use of my faculties here, I do not pass a day without sprawling some blank verse or tagging some rhymes; and here I must confess, that, (since I am on that subject,) I love you the more in that I believe you have liked me for my own sake and for nothing else. I have met with women whom I really think would like to be married to a Poem and to be given away by a Novel. I have seen your Comet, and only wish it was a sign that poor Rice would get well whose illness makes him rather a melancholy companion: and the more so as so to conquer his feelings and hide them from me, with a forc'd Pun. I kiss'd your Writing over in the hope you had indulg'd me by leaving a trace of honey – What was your dream? Tell it me and I will tell you the interpretation threreof.

Ever yours, my love!
John Keats.

Do not accuse me of delay – we have not here any opportunity of sending letters every day. Write speedily.

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To Fanny Brawne (11 October, 1819)

College Street –

My sweet Girl,

I am living to day in yesterday: I was in a complete fa[s]cination all day. I feel myself at your mercy. Write me ever so few lines and tell you [for me] you will never for ever be less kind to me than yesterday – You dazzled me – There is nothing in the world so bright and delicate – When Brown came out with that seemingly true story again[s]t me last night, I felt it would be death to me if you had ever believed it – though against anyone else I could muster up my obstinacy – Before I knew Brown could disprove it I was for the moment miserable. When shall we pass a day alone? I have had a thousand kisses, for which with my whole soul I thank love – but if you should deny me the thousand and first – ‘t would put me to the proof how great a misery I could live through. If you should ever carry your threat yesterday into execution – believe me ‘t is not my pride, my vanity or any petty passion would torment me – really ‘t would hurt my – heart – I could not bear it – I have seen Mrs Dilke this morning – she says she will come with me any fine day-

Ever yours
John Keats

Ah hertè mine!

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To Fanny Brawne (13 October, 1819)

13 October, 1819
25 College Street

My dearest Girl,

This moment I have set myself to copy some verses out fair. I cannot proceed with any degree of content. I must write you a line or two and see if that will assist in dismissing you from my Mind for ever so short a time. Upon my Soul I can think of nothing else – The time is passed when I had power to advise and warn you again[s]t the unpromising morning of my Life – My love has made me selfish. I cannot exist without you – I am forgetful of every thing but seeing you again – my Life seems to stop there – I see no further. You have absorb'd me. I have a sensation at the present moment as though I was dissolving – I should be exquisitely miserable without the hope of soon seeing you. I should be afraid to separate myself far from you. My sweet Fanny, will your heart never change? My love, will it? I have no limit now to my love – You note came in just here – I cannot be happier away from you – 'T is richer than an Argosy of Pearles. Do not threat me even in jest. I have been astonished that Men could die Martyrs for religion – I have shudder'd at it – I shudder no more – I could be martyr'd for my Religion – Love is my religion – I could die for that – I could die for you. My Creed is Love and you are its only tenet – You have ravish'd me away by a Power I cannot resist: and yet I could resist till I saw you; and even since I have seen you I have endeavoured often "to reason against the reasons of my Love." I can do that no more – the pain would be too great – My Love is selfish – I cannot breathe without you.

Yours for ever
John Keats

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To Fanny Brawne (19 October, 1819)

19 October, 1819
Great Smith Street
Tuesday Morn –

My sweet Fanny,
On awakening from my three days dream ("I cry to dream again") I find one and another astonish'd at my idleness and thoughtlessness – I was miserable last night – the morning is always restorative – I must be busy, or try to be so. I have several things to speak to you of tomorrow morning. Mrs Dilke I should think will tell you that I purpose living at Hampstead – I must impose chains upon myself – I shall be able to do nothing – I should like to cast the die for Love or death – I have no Patience with any thing else – if you ever intend to be cruel to me as you say in jest now but perhaps may sometimes be in earnest be so now and I will – my mind is in a tremble, I cannot tell what I am writing.

Ever my love yours
John Keats

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To Fanny Brawne (10 (?) February 1820)

10 (?) February 1820

My dearest Girl –
If illness makes such an agreeable variety in the manner of you eyes I should wish you sometimes to be ill. I wish I had read your note before you went last night that I might have assured you how far I was from suspecting any coldness: You had a just right to be a little silent to one who speaks so plainly to you. You must believe you shall, you will that I can do nothing say nothing think nothing of you but what has its spring in the Love which has so long been my pleasure and torment. On the night I was taken ill when so violent a rush of blood came to my Lungs that I felt nearly suffocated – I assure you I felt it possible I might not survive and at that moment though[t] of nothing but you – When I said to Brown 'this is unfortunate' I thought of you – 'T is true that since the first two or three days other subjects have entered my head – I shall be looking forward to Health and the Spring and a regular routine of our old Walks. Your affectionate

J.K –

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To Fanny Brawne (February (?) 1820)

February (?) 1820

My sweet love,

I shall wait patiently till tomorrow before I see you, and in the mean time, if there is any need of such a thing, assure you by your Beauty, that whenever I have at any time written on a certain unpleasant subject, it has been with your welfare impress'd upon my mind. How hurt I should have been had you ever acceded to what is, notwithstanding, very reasonable! How much the more do I love you from the general result! In my present state of Health I feel too much separated from you and could almost speak to you in the words of Lorenzo's Ghost to Isabella Your Beauty grows upon me and I feel a greater love through all my essence steal.
My greatest torment since I have known you has been the fear of you being a little inclined to the Cressid; but that suspicion I dismiss utterly and remain happy in the surety of your Love, which I assure you is as much a wonder to me as a delight. Send me the words "Good night" to put under my pillow.

Dearest Fanny,
Your affectionate
J.K.

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To Fanny Brawne (February (?) 1820)

February (?) 1820

My dearest Girl,
According to all appearances I am to be separated from you as much as possible. How I shall be able to bear it, or whether it will not be worse than your presence now and then, I cannot tell. I must be patient, and in the meantime you must think of it as little as possible. Let me not longer detain you from going to Town – there may be no end to this emprisoning of you. Perpaps you had better not come before tomorrow evening: send me however without fail a good night You know our situation – what hope is there if I should be recoverd ever so soon – my very health with [for will] not suffer me to make any great exertion. I am reccommended not even to read poetry much less write it. I wish I had even a little hope. I cannot say forget me – but I would mention that there are impossibilities in the world. No more of this – I am not strong enough to be weaned – take no notice of it in your good night. Happen what may I shall ever be my dearest Love

Your affectionate
J-K

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To Fanny Brawne (February (?) 1820)

February (?) 1820

My dearest Girl,

how could it ever have been my wish to forget you? how could I have said such a thing? The utmost stretch my mind has been capable of was to endeavour to forget you for your own sake seeing what a change [for chance] there was of my remaining in a precarious state of health. I would have borne it as I would bear death if fate was in that humour: but I should as soon think of choosing to die as to part from you. Believe too my Love that our friends think and speak for the best, and if their best is not our best it is not their fault, When I am better I will speak with you at large on these subjects, if there is any occasion – I think there is none. I am
rather nervous to day perhaps from being a little recovered and suffering my mind to take little excursions beyond the doors and windows. I take it for a good sign, but as it must not be encouraged you had better delay seeing me till tomorrow. Do not take the trouble of writing much: merely send me my goodnight. Remember me to your Mother and Margaret.

Your affectionate
J-K

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To Fanny Brawne (February (?) 1820)

February (?) 1820

My dearest Fanny,
I read your note in bed last night, and that might be the reason of my sleeping so much better. I think Mr Brown is right in supposing you may stop too long with me, so very nervous as I am. Send me every evening a written Good night. If you come for a few minutes about six it may be
the best time. Should you ever fancy me too low-spirited I must warn you to ascbribe [for ascribe] it to the medicine I am at present taking which is of a nerve-shaking nature – I shall impute any depression I may experience to this cause. I have been writing with a vile old pen the whole week, which is excessively ungallant. The fault is in the Quill: I have mended it and still it is very much inclin'd tomake blind es. However these last lines are in a much better style
of penmanship thof [for though] a little disfigured by the smear of black currant jelly; which has made a little mark on one of the Pages of Brown's Ben Jonson, the very best book he has. I have lick'd it but it remains very purplue [for purple]. I did not know whether to say purple or blue, so in the mixture of the thought wrote purplue which may be an excellent name for a colour made up of those two, and would suit well to start next spring. Be very careful of open doors and
windows and going without your duffle grey God bless you Love!

J. Keats-
P .S. I am sitting in the back room – Remember me to your Mother –

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To Fanny Brawne (February (?) 1820)

February (?) 1820

My dear Fanny,
Do not let your mother suppose that you hurt me by writing at night. For some reason or other your last night's note was not so treasureable as former ones. I would fain that you call me Love still. To see you happy and in high spirits is a great consolation to me – still let me believe that
you are not half so happy as my restoration would make you. I am nervous, I own, and may think myself worse than I really am; if so you must indulge me, and pamper with that sort of tenderness you have: manifested towards me in different Letters. My sweet creature when I look back upon the pains and torments I have suffer'd for you from the day I left you to go to the Isle of Wight; the ecstasies in which I have pass'd some days and the miseries in their turn, I wonder the more at the Beauty which has kept up the spell so fervently. When I send this round I shall be in the front parlour watching to see you show yourself for a minute in the garden. How illness stands as a barrier betwixt me and you! Even if I was well – I must make myself as good a Philosopher as possible. Now I have had opportunities of passing nights anxious and awake I have found other
thoughts intrude upon me. "If I should die," said I to myself, "I have left no immortal work behind me – nothing to make my friends proud of my memory – but I have lov'd the principle of beauty in all things, and if I had had time I would have made myself remember'd." Thoughts like
these came very feebly whilst I was in health and every pulse beat for you – now you divide with this (may I say it?) "last infirmity of noble minds" all my reflection.

God bless you, Love.
J. Keats.

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To Fanny Brawne (24 February, 1820)

24 (?) February 1820

My dearest Girl,
Indeed I will not deceive you with respect to my Health. This is the fact as far as I know. I have been confined three weeks and am not yet well – this proves that there is something wrong about me which my constitution will either conquer or give way to – Let us hope for the best. Do you
hear the Thrush singing over the field? I think it is a sign of mild weather – so much the better for me. Like all Sinners now I am ill I philosophise aye out of my attachment to every thing, Trees, flowers, Thrushes Spring, Summer, Claret &c &c aye every thing but you – my Sister would be glad of my company a little longer. That Thrush – is a fine fellow I hope he was fortunate in his choice this year – Do not send any more of my Books home. I have a great pleasure in the thought of you looking on them.

Ever yours
my sweet Fanny
J-K-

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To Fanny Brawne (March, 1820)

March, 1820

Sweetest Fanny,

You fear, sometimes, I do not love you so much as you wish? My dear Girl I love you ever and ever and without reserve. The more I have known you the more have I lov'd. In every way – even my jealousies have been agonies of Love, in the hottest fit I ever had I would have died for you. I have vex'd you too much. But for Love! Can I help it? You are always new. The last of your kisses was ever the sweetest; the last smile the brightest; the last movement the gracefullest. When you pass'd my window home yesterday, I was fill'd with as much admiration as if I had then seen you for the first time. You uttered a half complaint once that I only lov'd your Beauty. Have I nothing else then to love in you but that? Do not I see a heart naturally furnish'd with wings imprison itself with me? No ill prospect has been able to turn your thoughts a moment from me. This perhaps should be as much a subject of sorrow as joy – but I will not talk of that. Even if you did not love me I could not help an entire devotion to you: how much more deeply then must I feel for you knowing you love me. My Mind has been the most discontented and restless one that ever was put into a body too small for it. I never felt my Mind repose upon anything with complete and undistracted enjoyment – upon no person but you. When you are in the room my thoughts never fly out of window: you always concentrate my whole senses. The anxiety shown about our Love in your last note is an immense pleasure to me; however you must not suffer such speculations to molest you any more: not will I any more believe you can have the least pique against me. Brown is gone out — but here is Mrs Wylie — when she is gone I shall be awake for you. — Remembrances to your Mother.

Your affectionate, J. Keats

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To Fanny Brawne (March (?) 1820)

March (?) 1820

My dear Fanny,
I am much better this morning than I was a week ago: indeed I improve a little every day. I rely upon taking a walk with you upon the first of may: in the mean time undergoing a babylonish captivity I shall not be jew enough to hang up my harp upon a willow, but rather endeavour to clear up my arrears in versifying and with returning health begin upon something new: pursuant to which resolution it will be necessary to have my or rather Tavlor’s manuscript, which you, if you please, will send by my Messenger either to day or tomorrow. Is Mr D with you today? You appear’d very much fatigued last night: you must look a little brighter this morning. I shall not
suffer my little girl ever to be obscured like glass breath’d upon but always bright as it is her nature to. Feeding upon sham victuals and sitting by the fire will completely annul me. I have no need of an enchanted wax figure to duplicate me for I am melting in my proper person before the fire. If you meet with any thing better (worse) than common in your Magazines let me see it.

Good bye my
sweetest Girl
J- K

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To Fanny Brawne (March (?) 1820)

March (?) 1820

My dearest Fanny,

I slept well last night and am no worse this morning for it. Day by day if I am not deceived I get a more unrestrain'd use of my Chest. The nearer a racer gets to the Goal the more his anxiety becomes so I lingering upon the borders of health feel my impatience increase. Perhaps on your account I have imagined my illness more serious than it is: how horrid was the chance of slipping into the ground instead of into your arms – the difference is amazing Love – Death must come at last; Man must die, as Shallow says; but before that is my fate I feign would try what more pleasures than you have given so sweet a creature as you can give. Let me have another op[p]ortunity of years before me and I will not die without being remember'd. Take care of yourself dear that we may both be well in the Summer. I do not at all fatigue myself with writing, having merely to put a line or two here and there, a Task which would worry a stout state of the body and mind, but which just suits me as I can do no more.

Your affectionate
J.K.

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To Fanny Brawne (March (?) 1820)

March (?) 1820

My dearest Girl,
In consequence of our company I suppose I shall not see you before tomorrow. I am much better to day – indeed all I have to complain of is want of strength and a little tightness in the Chest. I envied Sam's walk with you to day; which I will not do again as I may get very tired of envying. I imagine you now sitting in your new black dress which I like so much and if I were a little less selfish and more enthousiastic I should run round and surprise you with a knock at the door. I fear I am too prudent for a dying kind of Lover. Yet, there is a great difference between going off in warm blood like Romeo, and making one's exit like a frog in a frost – I had nothing particular to say to day, but not intending that there shall be any interruption to our correspondence (which at some future time I propose offering to Murray) I write something I God bless you my sweet Love
Illness is a long lane, but I see you at the end of it, and shall mend my pace as well as possible

J-K

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To Fanny Brawne (May (?) 1820)

May (?) 1820
Tuesday Morn

My dearest Girl,
I wrote a Letter for you yesterday expecting to have seen your mother. I shall be selfish enough to send it though I know it may give you a little pain, because I wish you to see how unhappy I am for love of you, and endeavour as much as I can to entice you to give up your whole heart to me whose whole existence hangs upon you. You could not step or move an eyelid but it would shoot to my heart – I am greedy of you – Do not think of any thing but me. Do not live as if I was not existing – Do not forget me – But have I any right to say you forget me? Perhaps you think of me
all day. Have I any right to wish you to be unhappy for me? You would forgive me for wishing it, if you knew the extreme passion I have that you should love me – and for you to love me as I do you, you must think of no one but me, much less write that sentence. Yesterday and this morning
I have been haunted with .a sweet vision – I have seen you the whole time in your shepherdess dress. How my senses have ached at it! How my heart has been devoted to it! How my eyes have been full of Tears at it! I[n]deed I think a real Love is enough to occupy the widest heart – Your
going to town alone, when I heard of it was a shock to me – yet I expected it – promise me you will not for some time, till I get better. Promise me this and fill the paper full of the most endearing mames [for names]. If you cannot do so with good will, do my Love tell me – say what you think – confess if your heart is too much fasten'd on the world. Perhaps then I may see you at a greater distance, I may not be able to appropriate you so closely to myself. Were you to loose a favorite bird from the cage, how would your eyes ache after it as long as it was in sight; when out of sight you would recover a little. Perphaps if you would, if so it is, confess to me how many things are necessary to you besides me, I might be happier, by being less tantaliz'd. Well may you exclaim, how selfish, how cruel, not to let me enjoy my youth! to wish me to be unhappy! You must be so if you love me – upon my Soul I can be contented with nothing else. If you could really what is call'd enjoy yourself at a Party – if you can smile in peoples faces, and wish them to admire you now, you never have nor ever will love me – I see life in nothing but the cerrtainty of your Love – convince me of it my sweetest. If I am not somehow convinc'd I shall die of agony. If
we love we must not live as other men and women do – I cannot brook the wolfsbane of fashion and foppery and tattle. You must be mine to die upon the rack if I want you. I do not pretend to say I have more feeling than my fellows – but I wish you seriously to look over my letters kind
and unkind and consider whether the Person who wrote them can be able to endure much longer the agonies and uncertainties which you are so peculiarly made to create – My recovery of bodily hea[l]th will be of no benefit to me if you are not all mine when I am well. For god's sake save me – or tell me my passion is of too awful a nature for you. Again God bless
you

J.K.

No, my sweet Fanny, I am wrong. I do not want you to be unhappy, and yet I do, I must while there is so sweet a Beauty – my loveliest my darling! Good bye! I kiss you – O the torments!

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To Fanny Brawne (May (?) 1820)

May (?) 1820
Wednesday Morng.

My dearest Girl,
I have been a walk this morning with a book in my hand, but as usual I have been occupied with nothing hut you: I wish I could say in an agreeable manner. I am tormented day and night. They talk of my going to Italy. 'Tis certain I shall never recover if I am to be so long separate from you: yet with all this devotion to you I cannot persuade myself into any confidence of you. Past experience connected with the fact of my long separation from you gives me agonies which are scarcely to be talked of. When your mother comes I shall be very sudden and expert in asking her
whether you have been to Mrs. Dilke's, for she might say no to make me easy. I am literally worn to death, which seems my only recourse. I cannot forget what has pass'd. What? nothing : with a man of the world, but to me deathful. I will get rid of this as much as possible. When you were in
the habit of flirting with Brown you would have left off, could your own heart have felt one half of one pang mine did. Brown is a good sort of Man – he did not know he was doing me to death by inches. I feel the effect of everyone of those hours in my side now; and for that cause, though
he has done me many services, though I know his love and friendship for me, though at this moment I should be without pence were it not for his assistance, I will never see or speak to him until we are both old men, if we are to be. I will resent my .heart having been made a football.
You will call this madness. I have heard you say that it was not unpleasant to wait a few years – you have amusements – your mind is away – you have not brooded over one idea as I have, and how should you? You are to me an object intensely desireable – the air I breathe in a room empty
of you is unhealthy. I am not the same to you – no – you can wait – you have a thousand activities – you can be happy without me. Any party, any thing to fill up the day has been enough. How have you pass'd this month? Who have you smil'd with? All this may seem savage in me. You do
not feel as I do–you do not know what it is to love – one day you may – your time is not come. Ask yourself how many unhappy hours Keats has caused you in Loneliness. For myself I have been a Martyr the whole time, and for this reason I speak; the confession is forc'd from me by the
torture. I appeal to you by the blood of that Christ you believe in: Do not write to me if you have done anything this month which it would have pained me to have seen. You may have altered – if you have not – if you still behave in dancing rooms and other societies as I have seen you – I do
not want to live – if you have done so I wish this coming night may be my last. I cannot live without you, and not only you but chaste you; virtuous you. The Sun rises and sets, the day passes, and you follow the bent of your inclination to a certain extent – you have no conception of
the quantity of miserable feeling that passes through me in a day. Be serious ! Love is not a plaything – and again do not write unless you can do it with a crystal conscience. I would sooner die for want of you than –

Yours for ever
J. Keats.

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